

COMPASSION
CANNOT
CHOOSE...

SADHGURU

isha



COMPASSION CANNOT CHOOSE...

"Suffering is suffering, whatever may have been the cause for it. When there is suffering, what caused it is not important. There is no such thing as one kind of suffering being great and another kind of suffering being small. It is not right to think that if one suffers from cancer you should give him love and if another suffers from HIV/AIDS you must not give him love.

If our humanity is functional, when someone is suffering, we spontaneously feel that we ought to do something about it. No one has to teach this to us. But because we have come to wrong conclusions about those suffering from HIV/AIDS, an environment has been created in this society, to act against human nature, thereby destroying the basic humanity in us.

When the Tsunami happened, everyone was reaching out. I do not understand why people are not reaching out to the HIV situation in the same way and with the same vigor. Why not?

Clearly, compassion cannot choose ..."

- Sadhguru



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APAC-VHS
Chennai

Compassion Cannot Choose

SADHGURU



ISHA FOUNDATION

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Sadhguru

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Published by:

Isha Foundation

15, Govindasamy Naidu Layout,
Singanallur, Coimbatore - 641 005 INDIA.

Phone: +91-422-2515345

E-Mail: info@ishafoundation.org

Web: ishafoundation.org

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Foreword

The continuing spread of HIV/AIDS poses a threat not only to Public Health in India but also to the well-being of the society at large. The human suffering and the impact of the problem can be mitigated by a response which, led by the Government, involves all sections of the civil society including non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.

The faith-based organizations (FBOs) can particularly play a critical role in reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS through reduction of stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHAs) and preparing the individuals and communities to respond in a compassionate manner, to the problems associated with HIV/AIDS and its consequences. The Isha Foundation is one of the several FBOs working in the field of HIV/AIDS and providing the much-needed spiritual dimension to the response to the epidemic in India.

This booklet is the outcome of a successful gathering and discussion by the leadership and volunteers of the Isha Foundation with over 500 PLHAs on positive living.

Compassion Cannot Choose

The booklet, in the form of question answers, depicts several personal stories narrated by the PLHAs and the answers to their questions in an emotional, compassionate and spiritual style, thus giving a face to human problems. Every personal story and the response reminds the readers that even the most difficult situations can be used as opportunities for getting strength to face the problem boldly.

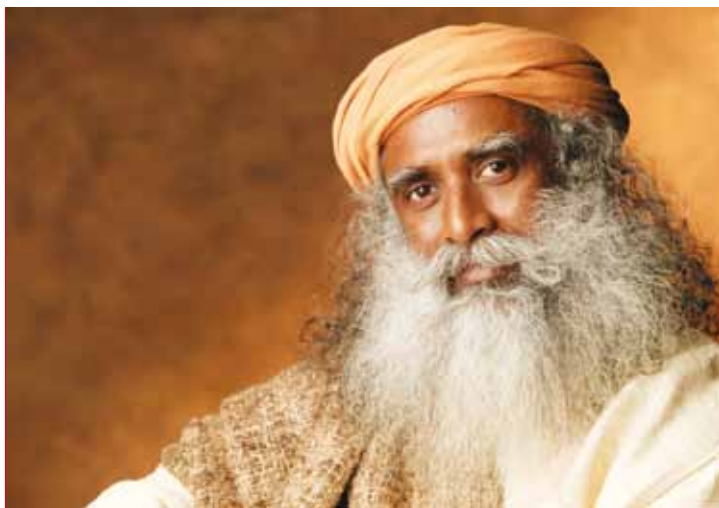
The booklet will be useful for general public and particularly for thousands of PLHAs in India and their family members, who I am sure, will get lot of solace and encouragement to live stronger and positive lives. I appreciate the work done by Isha Foundation and other similar organizations to alleviate the human suffering of thousands of people and making a contribution to India's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

- Dr. Robert Clay,

Director,
Office of Population, Health & Nutrition,
USAID, New Delhi.

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Sadhguru

Founder, Isha Foundation

Considered one of the most profound mystics of modern times, Sadhguru is a spiritual master with a difference. An arresting blend of profundity and pragmatism, his life and work serve as a reminder that inner sciences are not esoteric philosophies from an outdated past, but a contemporary science, vitally relevant to our times. Probing, passionate and provocative, deeply insightful and unfailingly witty, Sadhguru's

talks have earned him the reputation of a speaker and opinion-maker of international renown.

Sadhguru has been a delegate to the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit, as well as a special invitee to the World Economic Forum at Davos each year since 2006. He was also an invited speaker at the recent Australian Leadership Retreat, Tallberg Forum, Indian Economic Summit and various other international forums. Listeners have been ubiquitously impressed by his astute and incisive grasp of current issues and world affairs, as well as his unerringly scientific approach to the question of human well being.

Moved by the sufferings of those affected by HIV/AIDS and concerned about the threat it poses to humanity, Sadhguru has brought spirituality and yoga to the aid of people living with HIV through the Isha Foundation, a non-religious and non-denominational organization, founded by him.

With 150 centers worldwide, Isha promotes the well-being of individuals as well as social development projects. Within the state of Tamil Nadu, it provides intensive health care and other services to the rural poor and those in urban slums. Isha's members work in the state's highly affected districts to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. The Foundation runs Action for Rural Rejuvenation project to provide free medical treatment and counselling through 21 Mobile Health Clinics,

covering a population of 3.6 million people in some 3,000 villages. In the media and among the public, Sadhguru rallies against stigma and discrimination to people living with HIV/AIDS, a commitment he backs with strong implementation of yoga programs for those affected by the disease.

He leads HIV-positive people in sathsangs, or spiritual gatherings, one of which was televised throughout the country. He plans a similar broadcast for the coming year. The Isha Foundation is currently setting up a tree nursery, run by HIV-positive people, as a part of an initiative to plant 114 million saplings over the next ten years and provide an income-earning activity with a social contribution.

Sadhguru has also developed yogic practices for HIV-positive people that he believes make a difference in how they handle HIV-related disease. Isha's long-term objective is to create community centers complete with medical units and hospice services, an orphanage, a home where destitute HIV-positive people can live in dignity, a yoga and meditation centre, as well as a livelihood training center.



Preface

The story of human civilization has been punctuated with sordid tales of disasters and tragedies. While Nature inflicted some of them, humans inflicted some of the most gruesome ones upon their fellow beings. The story of HIV/AIDS is one that combines the two, making it the most potent threat to the existence of human race on the planet.

HIV/AIDS is not the first of the deadly diseases to strike the planet. Malaria, tuberculosis, polio, leprosy, plague, etc. have all wreaked havoc and killed people on a large scale before they were tamed by modern medicine. What makes HIV/AIDS unique, however, is that while its epidemiology has posed frightful challenges to the medical fraternity, which are yet to be met, the stigma associated with the disease has caused us to witness some of the worst human behavior since the time of head hunters.

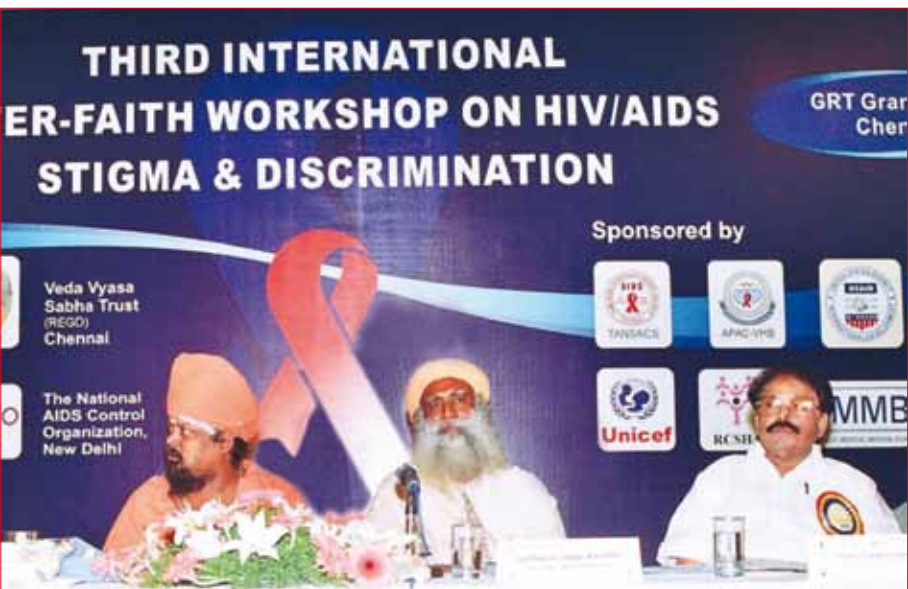
In terms of epidemiology, HIV/AIDS has the dubious distinction of not being a “disease” as such. However, by destroying the human immune system, it is the ‘mother of all diseases’, ensuring horrible deaths from the choicest cocktail of

diseases which even the best modern medical care grapples to come to terms with. The illness itself can be very long drawn, slowly and cruelly prolonging the misery of those suffering from it.

While the complexity of the disease is Nature's contribution to the situation, the prevailing social stigma, victimization, neglect and indifference, surpasses Nature in cruelty. In many ways it is as if the disease has stirred the most fundamental dogmas and hypocrisies of human societies, bringing to fore the deepest human frailties, numbing the basic humanity of individuals.

Such dilemmas, however, are not unprecedented. Time and again, in human history individuals and societies have been confronted with such challenges. What they made of these challenges or how they responded to them often decided the course of human history and emancipation of the individual. One encounters rather constantly, such dilemmas and challenges in one's life, though they may not necessarily be of the same magnitude. Whether people come out strengthened and empowered or end up broken and destroyed is an area where all of us can make a big difference.

The yogic lore is well-versed with this. In fact the most common symbolism of spiritual flowering -- the lotus flower depicts the ideal. Though condemned by the laws of Nature



Sadhguru at the Third International Inter-Faith workshop on HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination.

to live in the midst of filth, the lotus plant, while drawing nourishment from its surroundings, stays untouched and well above it. Undeterred by the stench, it puts out beautiful blossoms deeply enriching itself and its environment.

Such are also the possibilities for human consciousness. Empowering ourselves with modern science and technology coupled with time-tested ancient wisdom of our ancestors,

and applying the two along with basic humanity in all of us, not only can we make the horror of HIV/AIDS a thing of the past but also leave humankind deeply enriched in the process.

Such an opportunity stares us in the face in the form of a disease.

The first time I came across HIV/AIDS was when I was persuaded to attend an interfaith conference on stigma and discrimination due to HIV/AIDS. “What have I got to do with this?” I thought. “What are they going to tell me that I don’t already know, anyway? Didn’t I know all about the disease? Yes, people suffered badly from the disease, but then don’t people suffer from cancer? Don’t more people die of malaria? Why all this fuss about it? And stigma? Oh, that is only among the ignorant and the illiterate -- just because there is a hyped up campaign, let us not lose perspective...” This is how I went to the conference.

In the conference where all the major religions of the world were well-represented, we sat through erudite discourses on how each religion propounded the same values of love, compassion, tolerance, and selfless service. Considering that over 80% of the world’s population ascribes to some religion or the other, this by itself should have been sufficient to eradicate the stigma. But apparently what was happening with us, the audience in the room, was what was happening with the people of the world. For one, we were bored. Moreover,

even with what appealed to us, we thought it was either for someone else or was simply not practical to practice. So, there really was no breakthrough, nor did we expect anything on the following day.

When things were progressing like this, we were presented with a few people who were HIV positive, and as a matter of appeal they wished to tell us their stories. This is the first time I had come face-to-face with someone affected by the disease. Compared to the regality of the forenoon's session, along with my own complacency and boredom with it all, this was like a bombshell.

One by one, young women, housewives, immigrant workers and others narrated how they were devastated by the revelation that they were HIV positive. They described, blow by blow, how the very people they had considered their own – their family, friends, neighbors and the society as such – dealt them the most inhuman treatment and how desolate and desperate they had become. For once, one could hear hearts stirring in the room. This is something that nobody could walk past, not something that could be allowed to happen to anybody, ever.

One could never imagine in how many ways these people, who were already sick, were made to suffer in different stages of life, from birth, to childhood, to marriage, and death. This



Sadhguru addressing a public sathsang in Tamil Nadu.

discrimination does not end with death and continues at funerals.

Initially, one reason why I was not too enthusiastic about being at the conference was that I did not see what one could do about it even if one wanted to. Didn't Isha Foundation have enough social work on its hands to last for the next 25 years? How were we going to fit this into it? Looking back now, the underlying reason was that I did not think it was important enough to take one more thing into our hands. But

now shaken up by the human agony unraveled before me, I began looking desperately to see what we could do about it. As I began piecing together what I had seen, heard and experienced, it occurred to me that Isha Foundation, in fact, already had many pieces of the puzzle in its hands.

As the day progressed, and we began looking at it as a group, we were able to put together a proposal as to what the foundation could do. Regardless of whether we could completely arrest the disease or not, there was much we could do to ease the suffering on the social, psychological and physiological planes. We could also do a lot to reverse the stigma and build goodwill and compassion for those suffering from the disease. Thus, slowly we charted a course of action.

For more than two decades Isha Foundation has been working with the people of Tamil Nadu, and the work with the rural communities has been a high priority. Building upon Sadhguru's personal charisma, credibility, popularity and the goodwill he enjoys in the society, especially among the youth, we planned to take on the preventive and promotive aspects of the disease. We leveraged the capabilities of the foundation to assist the curative and rehabilitative processes through a personal empowerment program. We decided to use the mass media to offer hope, guidance and acceptance for the HIV positive people. This also worked to create awareness and

understanding in the society regarding their plight, while taking the problem of stigma and discrimination head-on.

In the months that followed, we saw ourselves engaged in much activity. In January 2007, Sadhguru conducted a “Sathsang”, or a spiritual gathering, exclusively for those suffering from HIV/AIDS. In probably a first-ever occurrence of its kind by a major spiritual leader, Sadhguru held interactions with them, offering understanding, counsel, guidance, and wisdom in an overwhelmingly compassionate manner. The interactions lasted for about four hours, after which Sadhguru led hundreds of volunteers of the foundation in serving them lunch. The entire event was telecast by all the major television networks in the state and touched the hearts of millions of people.

In order to provide physical, mental and spiritual relief to those suffering from HIV positive people, Sadhguru designed a special set of yogic practices, through a program conducted in seven high risk districts of the state. Since care-givers form an important link in the preventive and rehabilitative process, and because they also suffer much stress and hardship, a special sensitization and empowerment programs was conducted exclusively for them.

Today, the Foundation has 21 Mobile Health Clinics which serve a population of close to 3.6 million people in the rural

areas. In addition to providing free primary health care at their doorsteps, these Mobile Health Clinics assist in dissemination of information related to HIV/AIDS. Plans are afoot to start community care centers that will not only provide medical treatment for those affected by HIV/AIDS but also provide vocational and livelihood training and a residential community for HIV positive people, so that those who have been shunned by the society or are abandoned by their families can find dignified and meaningful ways to live and die. Sadhguru has designed special yogic practices for children who were infected and affected by the disease.

Thanks to the efforts of governmental, non-governmental and international donor agencies, today a HIV positive person can look forward to reasonable medical support coming his way. However, as we saw in personal interactions with them and in those with Sadhguru at the Sathsang, from the range of their sufferings, the most cruel blow is that which is dealt by society. This is something that we as a society have created and something that we as human beings cannot afford to live with, something that should make our heads hang in shame.

Of the several questions that people posed to Sadhguru in which they pour out their heart and seek his counsel, we have selected a few that highlight the sufferings of the most vulnerable – women and children.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to AIDS Prevention and Control Project (APAC-VHS) of Voluntary Health Services Chennai and USAID for their pioneering contribution of organizing the International Interfaith Conference to fight HIV/AIDS, recognizing the importance of the involvement of faith based organizations and envisioning an appropriate role in the fight against the disease.

APAC-VHS provided funding and technical support for conducting the special sathsang for People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHS), as well as its telecast in major television channels. APAC-VHS also supported imparting special yogic practices to both PLHS and care givers.

We are also grateful for their support in bringing out this publication and the videos of the sathsang, which we hope will guide and inspire all.

– Swami Nisarga

Compassion Cannot Choose

Today, there have been many developments in science and medicine, several preventative measures like vaccination have been developed, but in spite of that, we have a situation now where there are several diseases for which there is no remedy. Even as we go on inventing new remedies, nature keeps posing us new challenges. This will always be so. When a new challenge arises, needless emotions and needless hostility relating to them in society also arise. But, after a while, when everyone understands how to fight these challenges, then it is no longer a big issue.

This has happened again and again in our society.

Currently, there is a lot of hostility in society towards a person infected with HIV. This is mainly because of lack of understanding among the public about the nature of the disease: how people get it, how it spreads from one person to another and what we could do about it.

In society, people have no understanding of this disease. Every person fears that he may somehow get it. There is this fear that one may even get it by just looking at an HIV patient.

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“True compassion is not about giving or taking. True compassion is doing just what is needed.”

To go beyond this fear, we need to spread the necessary awareness.

You see no such deep hostility in Western countries because they have gained the necessary understanding about this disease. It is important that we bring about a similar situation in India too. If we make everyone in society have a proper understanding of this disease, it will not be a big issue here also.

There are many diseases which affect a man and cause him to suffer. It is not that he suffers only because he is affected

by HIV. If you look at it, HIV in itself is not a disease. It is the loss of immunity in the body that weakens it and takes away its ability to resist diseases. If you look around, everybody does not have the same level of immunity. Some people become sick merely by eating something sold on the roadside. Others are not affected by whatever they eat. This is because the power to resist diseases, the immunity, is not the same in every person. With HIV, one's power to resist disease becomes very low, because of which one may get all kinds of diseases.

But even with HIV, if we maintain our life energies in an intense state, our immunity and the power to resist diseases can be increased to a great extent. We may not be able to restore it completely, but we can surely increase it to a large extent. If we pay some attention to how we eat, how we breathe, how we act, how we live and so on, we can certainly increase our power to resist this disease.

It is our intention to offer this possibility to one and all.

When a person suffers, it is natural for another person to be sensitive to his suffering. This much sensitivity and this much humanity exists in everyone. But we have put our sensitivity and our humanity out of action. This is because we have come to all kinds of wrong conclusions about those suffering from the disease.

This is not only the case with HIV, but in the world several kinds of terrible things are happening for various reasons. People have been made to suffer for ages because their caste is not right, their religion is not right, their gender is not right, and so on. So, do not think that this hostility is only with regards to HIV alone. There are all kinds of nonsense going on in society and this is one of them.

HIV/AIDS is no more just a medical problem, but a social crisis in the making. In fact it is spreading into epidemic proportions in India. Western countries have handled HIV infections quite effectively, but slowly, HIV/AIDS is becoming the scourge of the poor nations.

Africa is reeling under its impact. At one time we thought that in a country like India the disease would not spread very rapidly because of strong social codes. Obviously, we have been wrong in that assumption. The fact that today even the rural populations are getting infected means there are many aspects of the society, which we have not understood properly. Even though it is very important that we strengthen the family structure, let us be clear that such a thing is not going to happen just because we advise people to do so.

If we had an entire culture, which was rising beyond the physical dimension of life, these things would be in control to some extent. But today we have embraced the market

economy to such a point where it is all about give and take. It is all about who is getting the best out of whom. When this has become the modality of life, when all the ideologies in the world have disappeared and it is all about the market, you cannot keep the market out of the house either. You cannot banish the market from your family. It enters your family also.

Whatever the interventions, ultimately, living sensibly is the only solution. It is important that people who are infected with HIV should act responsibly and carefully. They should take up the responsibility of seeing that this disease does not spread to others through them. Without your responsibility and cooperation, there is no chance of this happening. If knowingly or unknowingly we have stepped on something, we should see how to clean our feet and we should also tell others not to step on that. We should also bring the necessary discipline in our lives, which is necessary for understanding how we can look at life beyond this suffering. You must undertake that responsibility.

Regardless of the causes which have brought us to this point, it is extremely important that the problem of HIV/AIDS is handled on a national scale with all the necessary involvement from all groups of people.

If you have any questions you can ask them now...



Questions and Answers

Questioner: *My name is Tamilselvi. I have had HIV/AIDS for the past five years. HIV/AIDS has been spreading on a large scale. Is there any connection between this and spirituality?*

Is this the result of past sins or our karma?

Sadhguru: Whether it is stone or earth or plant or animal, or the human body, the physical world has always followed the law of cause and effect. But generally, we are limited to seeing only the effect or the outcome. We do not have the capability of seeing the cause of the outcome.

In our society right from a very young age we are taught that something is right and something else is wrong. Once you have been told that something is wrong, that you should not see it or think about it or do it, then it becomes impossible not to see it, or think about it or do it. This is the very nature of our mind. The thing that you say you do not want keeps going on intensely in your mind.

It happened like this: once a man had a big desire to acquire miraculous powers like walking on water, sitting in fire, and walking in the air etc. In other words, he wanted to perform circus feats. Even though he went to many Gurus, no one paid any attention to his request.

After a while somebody told him: “There is no use looking for a Guru in India. There is a Buddhist monk in Tibet and he has all kinds of miraculous powers. You should go there.” The man walked all the way there. It is not an easy feat to cross the Himalayan Mountains on foot, but he got there just through sheer determination. When he reached the Buddhist monastery, the monk there looked at him and said: “What will you do with miraculous powers? If you go back to your place and walk on water, you will attract big crowds for three days. After just three days people will say, ‘Oh, he walks on water’ and ignore you. Then you would think it would be better if you had a boat. What is the use of all this to you? Instead I shall teach you meditation. By practicing it, you can live a wholesome life.” This man said to himself: “I don’t need meditation. I didn’t need to come to this man to learn meditation. In my own country everybody knows about meditation.” Then he told the monk, “All I want is miraculous powers”.

The Buddhist monk tried to dissuade him in every way, but this man would not listen. The monk asked him to take a bath

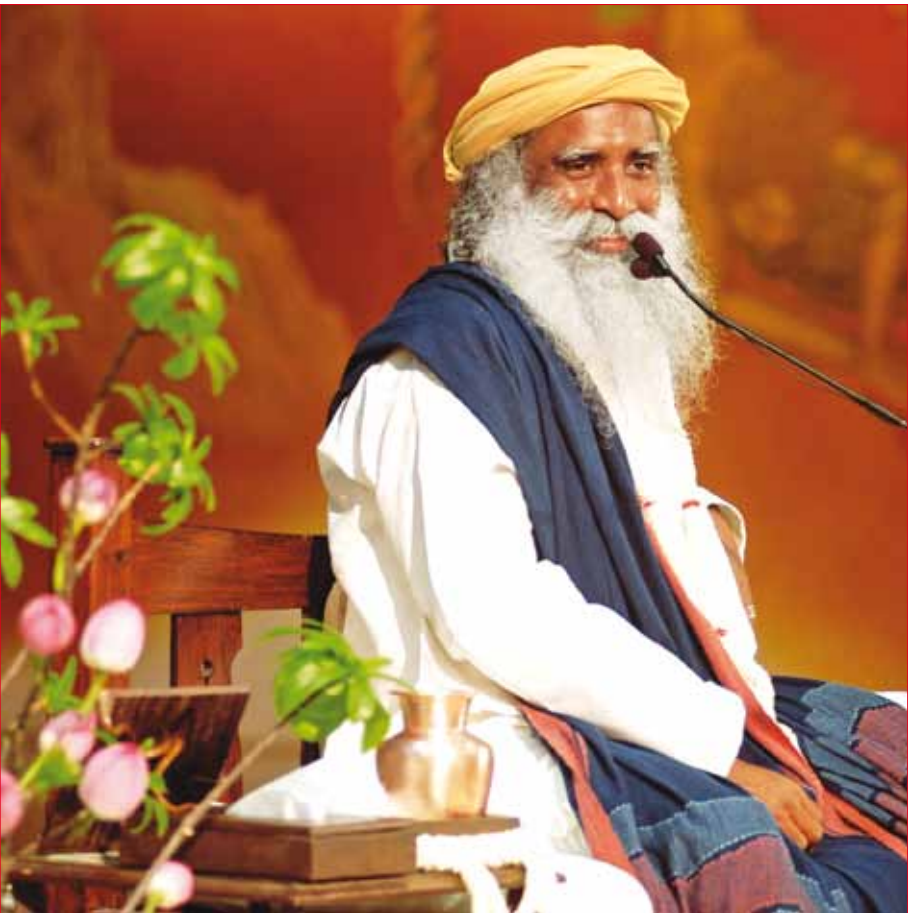
early in the morning, at four o'clock, and come to him and he would teach him all the mantras required to get miraculous powers. This man went and took a bath in the cold river and his body turned almost blue. Even though all the bones in his body were shaking, he came and sat with firmness, because he was extremely eager to get miraculous powers.

The Buddhist monk saw his determination and said: "This is not a very difficult thing to do. I shall teach you three basic mantras. If you repeat these three basic mantras three times, you will get all the miraculous powers. These mantras are: *Buddham Sharanam Gacchami*; *Dhammam Sharanam Gacchami*; *Sangham Sharanam Gacchami*. If you utter this mantra three times, all the miraculous powers will be yours, but when you utter these mantras, you must not think of monkeys." "Is that all?" asked this person. "Yes that's all," said the monk, "you can go back now".

This man came out in great elation. "This stupid monk asks me not to think of monkeys; what does he know of my culture? I am a Brahmin. Why am I going to think of a monkey? I am not a hunter to think about a monkey. I may think of some Veda or Upanishad, but why would I think of a monkey? It is over ten years since I have even seen a monkey."

He returned to his country, all the while thinking about monkeys. On the way, he went to the river Ganges thinking

Compassion Cannot Choose



“Knowingly or unknowingly if we have stepped on something, we should see how to cleanse our feet and we should also tell others not to step on that.”

that if he took a bath in it all his old sins would be washed away. After finishing his bath he sat down and started to chant the mantra he just learnt. “Buddham...” he began and a monkey flashed in his mind. If monkey appeared he had to take a bath again. So, he took a bath once again and as soon as began “Buddham...” the monkey came again.

After more intense efforts, even if he just started saying “Bu...” the monkey came. After one more week of this, the monkey started appearing in his mind without him doing anything at all. Whatever he was doing, whether sitting, standing, or sleeping, only the monkey filled his mind. So he walked back all the way to the Buddhist monastery and pleaded with the monk: “I do not want any miraculous powers. Please release me from the monkey.”

This is the way your mind is right now. What you do not want is exactly what happens in your mind. You can try it, if you want. Let us say for the next ten seconds none of you are supposed to think of a monkey. Is it possible? In this society they taught your mind that something is good and something else is bad, so you must not think of it. Now your mind thinks only of what they told you not to think of. This is how your mind is right now.

This cause and effect phenomenon has always been at work. It is not that you got the disease because you did something in

some other birth. From the day we were born, what we ate, what we read, what we did, in what kind of environment we lived, with what kind of people we were in contact with, all these factors together have shaped us into the kind of people we now are.

Karma means action. From the day we were born whatever action we did has led us to become the kind of person we are now. We got a disease knowingly or unknowingly. Not knowing is also a karma. If understanding is karma, not understanding is also karma. If we understand something, there is benefit, and if we do not understand something, there is suffering. Both are karma.

We can look at it this way: if we got this disease five years ago, then some five or six years ago there must have been some kind of karma performed knowingly or unknowingly. That is no reason why we should destroy our own lives now based on that. But, what we are doing now, what karma we are doing at this moment is very, very important.

What we did in the past may have been in unawareness. But at this moment, if you have some awareness, you will not do the karma which leads to suffering. No man will do it. What we are going to do with our life today and tomorrow is more important for us, not the old karma. We cannot change

what has already happened. We can bring some awareness to ourselves by looking at what has already happened.

Whatever has already happened can be a lesson to us. We cannot change it, but we can do something about what is happening now. We can also do something about whatever is going to happen in the future, if we focus our attention and energy on it.

This is a big problem in our country: we do not change what is before us, we do not do what is in our hands, but we keep telling God daily what He should do. Doesn't God know? Leave Him alone and let Him do his work on his own. You should do your own work properly. You should do what is in your power as a human being.



Questioner: *My name is Lakshmi. It is now 4 or 5 years since I knew that I have HIV. I have a son and a daughter. After I learned that I have HIV, I did not go out for a year.*

I request you to pray to God that women like me should live with self-confidence.

Sadhguru: First of all, what we need to examine is what we call Divinity.

Compassion Cannot Choose



“The way we think is the way we become. Whatever you hold as the highest, naturally all your energies get drawn towards that.”

In every culture, there is a different name and a different form for God, but there is a common understanding in everybody's mind about God. Whatever is the source of all this Creation, we call it God. It is also clear that the basis of the creation of this body has been functioning from within us. This means whatever you call God is also within us. They have said that God is everywhere. If that is so, then He is within us too.

Now, we can pray, if we have the necessity, but if he is within us, there is no need for us to pray. We just have to be in contact with Him. Only because we are not in contact, there are all these problems. If we are in contact with that which is the source of creation, then we do not have to think about self-confidence. The Creator cannot be without self-confidence. There is no possibility of such a thing.

Now, we have to see what kind of a tool we require to be in contact with the Creator within us and how to remain in contact with it. If we establish that contact, then there is no need for us to pray. My whole purpose of coming here today is to give you the tool required to establish that contact.



Questioner: *My name is Vadivu. I have been living with HIV-AIDS for the past seven years. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are infected with HIV-AIDS in Tamil Nadu.*

Compassion Cannot Choose

Many people do not seek medical help even though they are aware that they have this disease. They also hesitate to tell others if they have been found HIV positive.

If people come forward for testing, even if they have the disease, they could be treated and made to live longer. Instead, they just suffer and die.

What can you say about it?

Sadhguru: No matter what kind of a person someone is, his life is very valuable to him. Why would he not go for medical treatment to save his own valuable life? This only speaks of the extent of hostility that exists in society. That is why he is prepared to die rather than letting anyone know of his disease. Because there is so much hostility in society towards HIV, people are afraid to even speak about it to others. In addition to suffering from the disease, they are also in fear of being confronted by the question as to how they got the disease.

If one denies one's illness and keeps saying "I don't have any disease. I am well," then it is possible that he or she will spread the disease to many others. If their own lives and the lives of others have to be protected, we have to create an environment that is supportive to them.

People who have this kind of disease become somewhat weak in every way. If we do not create an environment free of hostility, their state of mind and emotions will be terribly affected. This hostility from the society will be a source of much greater suffering than this disease itself.

In other parts of the world, people with HIV/AIDS have even lived for 15 years or so after their diagnosis. Everybody has to die one day. Are the other people going to live for 300 years? They too live only for a limited time – maybe a few years more or few years less. If one takes care about how one lives, there is a possibility of going beyond this disease.

Much research is being done about HIV/AIDS. Efforts are being made to even create a vaccine for the disease. This is of course important. But in India, the most important challenge is to remove the hostility against the disease. This hostility, this disease that the society is afflicted by is much more dangerous than HIV/AIDS itself. Removing this hostility alone is proving to be a very big task. It is not something which can be removed in a day.



Questioner: *My name is Geetha. At present, both in the big hospitals and in small clinics, HIV patients are thrown out of the clinics and are not*



Sadhguru interacting with children affected by HIV/AIDS during the sathsang.

being treated irrespective of the seriousness of their illness.

This happens at the time of childbirth, at the time of surgery or even when the very life of the patient is in danger. This is the case in spite

of increased awareness and training given to the doctors in this field.

We have already lost too many lives like this because we believed that this state of affairs would change in course of time. As time goes on, we may only end up with a situation in which more and more lives are lost.

What is your advice to these doctors?

Sadhguru: If doctors themselves have this kind of hostility, then there will be no possibility whatsoever of removing the hostility from the society. If the doctors are afraid like this, the hostility will undoubtedly increase in the lay people.

Without the least doubt, in no hospital or clinic has any doctor the right to behave in this way. If such things have taken place in the hospital, severe action must be taken by the government. There is a law on this.

People in the medical profession have a very important and clear responsibility. They should be the ones to make the society understand that this disease does not spread merely by ordinary contact. But if they themselves take fright, then we cannot blame the others in the society. Then, there will be no possibility whatsoever of bringing awareness to ordinary

people. If such things have taken place in the hospital, severe action must be taken by the government.



Questioner: *My name is Muthulakshmi. For the last 4 years I have been living with HIV. When it became known to my in-laws that my husband and I were both affected by HIV, my husband was accepted, but they did not accept me. They have accepted their son even though he is affected by HIV but I who married him in order to live with him have not been accepted.*

It has always been that women are meant to suffer throughout their life. They suffer both at birth and at death. Women infected by HIV are rejected by their families and by the society.

What can you say about this?

Sadhguru: Certainly this situation exists in our country. We cannot ignore this. We cannot turn a blind eye to this. The problem for women has not occurred just because of HIV but it has started right from their birth. They want to kill a female child after she is born and even before that they want to abort the fetus during pregnancy itself. If a woman contracts HIV, the discrimination against her would be worse.

This is a very deep-rooted problem in our society. Although, there have been many efforts to bring about a change, but they have not been adequate. But, for each one of these problems, if we start a revolution, no change will come about.

It is a big mistake to discriminate between a man and a woman. Why do you go on discriminating at every point of time without accepting that we are all human beings? Whether at home or on the road or wherever you go, there is discrimination between a man and a woman. Had we looked at each person just as a human being, we would not have had this problem.

Where did this discrimination come from? We have brought up a male child in a particular way and a female child in another way. We have firmly established in our mind that in everything there should be this distinction. If you do not get rid of this problem at the root, no one else can come into your house and solve it.

The problems you have in your home cannot be solved by the government or by an NGO or even by me. It is the attitudes you have in your home that should change. If we wish to create a social situation in which a woman can lead a proper life, it is very important to bring about a change in our attitudes whether it is at home or in society or anywhere else.



Sadhguru serving a meal to those affected by HIV/AIDS after the satsang.

It will not change if only a few men make efforts towards this. It is only when women also take up that responsibility that they can come out of this situation. At present, there is a very bad situation in our homes: women look at a male and a female child differently. It is precisely they who practice the discrimination.

Is it not necessary that we create a situation at home in which we would, without discriminating between a boy and a girl, provide education, food and support to both of them equally? This must first change in the homes. Without effecting a change in our homes, can we bring about a change in society at large? But unfortunately, women themselves take pride if they give birth to a male child and do not take any pride if they give birth to a female child.

No change can be brought about unless we bring about a change in their attitude.



Questioner: *My name is Parvathi. I was born in a very simple family. I have studied up to IX class. My parents arranged my marriage. I gave birth to a very beautiful female child. When the child was 5 months old, I learned that my husband had AIDS. Both of us wanted to commit suicide then, but we changed our mind when we heard*

our child crying. Within the next six months my husband died. It took a year for me to come out of the depressing situation.

What would you like to say to women like me and to this society?

Sadhguru: The situation that many of you are facing today is not simple. But, when a certain level of suffering and threat has come into your life, the only thing that you can do is to strengthen yourself – make yourself capable of dealing with such situations.

Societies around the world have faced a variety of such situations. It need not necessarily be in the form of a disease; it can come in the form of terrorism, war, famine, Tsunami and a million different ways.

So when a calamity strikes , societies stay together and help each other to come out of the situation. When the Tsunami happened, everyone was reaching out. I do not understand why they are not reaching out to the HIV/AIDS situation in the same way and with the same vigor.

You cannot take away the upheavals of life, but you can take away the upheavals that happen within you. That is all a human being can do. No matter what situation we face, we

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One of the 21 Mobile Health Clinics of Isha Foundation that provides free medical aid to the poor in 3,000 villages in Tamil Nadu.

can come out of it stronger or broken. This opportunity all of us have in our lives.

Whatever calamity strikes us, we can come out strongly or come out broken. As a single woman with a child in your hands you have come out wonderfully well. That is really

beautiful. But so many other people may not have the strength and capability to do so.

To provide them with the strength and capability, to provide them with opportunities so that they may rise to that level of capability, is what we are trying to offer right now.

Now, the situation that you are in cannot be changed by someone's teachings. An individual who wants to become strong within herself, does not need advice but tools and methods through which we can strengthen her body and mind. This is what we are trying to offer in the form of yoga. What we refer to as Inner Engineering or Isha Yoga is just a method through which you can strengthen your body and mind in a fundamental way, so that it will give you the necessary strength to face life.

We can certainly give you that method.



Questioner: *My name is Valli. I come from Madurai. I got married in 1990. I have two children, and I was told that I had HIV. My husband died of HIV in 1997. After his death, my in-laws kept my children with them and sent me out of the home in hatred.*

It has now been 8 years since I have seen my children. I do not know the state of my children – whether they are fed properly, whether they are sleeping properly, are being taken care of properly, being educated etc.

There are many women like me who are rejected by their families, and we are troubled by the urge to commit suicide because of this rejection.

What advice can you give us to avoid such thoughts and how do we deal with them when they arise?

Sadhguru: It is impossible to ask a mother to leave her children and live in peace. There is no use telling her that. If you have left your children there because of your financial problems, that is different. But if you have the means to look after your children, then it is possible to see that they live with you.

Until the children come of age, no matter who says what in the family, according to the law, they should certainly be with you. If this is what you want, it is possible to have your children with you. But after you bring the children with you, you may have fears about their future, of what is going to happen to them after you die. You must certainly keep this in mind.



“Karma is not in what you have done or in what you have not done. It is your volition, the way you live, the way you are within yourself.”

Now, about being unable to bear all of this and wanting to commit suicide: when does a person get thoughts of suicide? Whenever one's life does not go according to one's wishes, one feels like committing suicide. If you lose your property you want to die. If people dear to you leave you or die, then you want to commit suicide. Because we have this false belief that by committing suicide all our sufferings will come to an end.

This life was not created by us. So, we had better give up the idea of being able to take it away. We can only take away what we have created ourselves. We have no right whatsoever to take away something which we did not create.

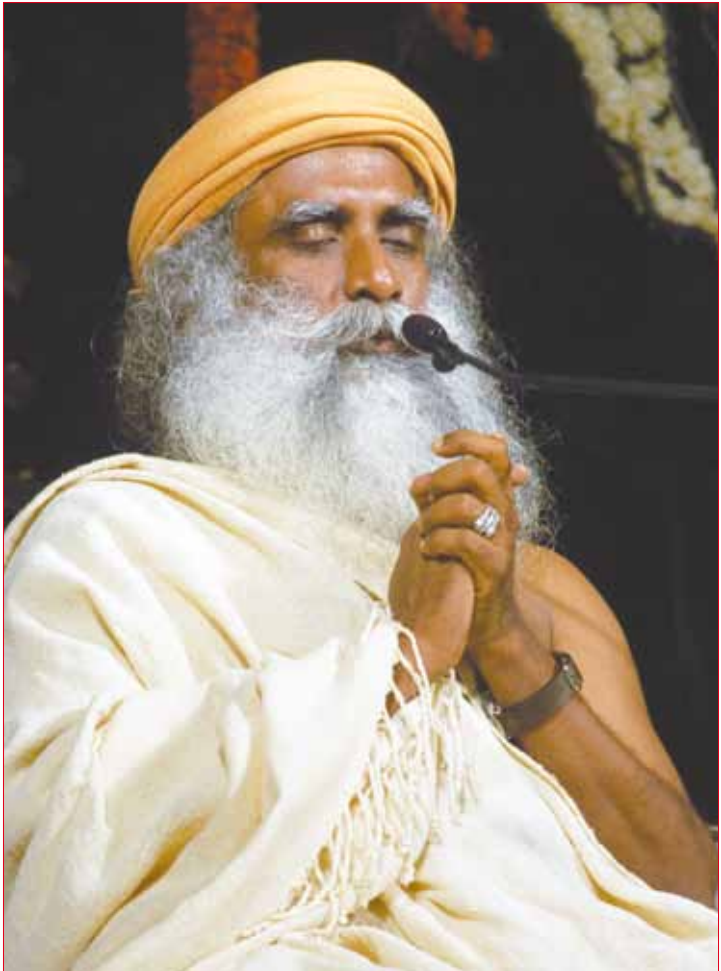
Now, for some reason you are suffering and it may not necessarily be because of HIV. For other reasons also you might feel like committing suicide. If some suffering comes to us, we can either grow because of it or get destroyed. Each person has this possibility in every situation in life.

No matter what happens, we must use every life situation for our growth, and it is possible for us to create a proper environment for our growth. We can do this for ourselves, and we can do this for a hundred others around us.

If you are affected by a disease, let others say what they say, but you should be determined to use this very disease to transform yourself into a wonderful person. You should use this very suffering as manure and blossom into a very good human being.

In yoga, we always use the lotus flower as a symbol, because a lotus flower grows well only where there is a lot of slush. Slush is ugly to look at, but the flower is beautiful and sweet-smelling. This very slush has transformed itself into a flower.

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“Life has come from a very beautiful source. If you remain in touch with that source, everything about you will be beautiful.”

We may not like to look at slush and we may turn away. We can either think: “There is only slush everywhere, so let us also become slush,” or like the lotus flower, we can use the same slush and blossom into a beautiful flower.



Questioner: *My name is Kamala. I am HIV positive. I am unable to sleep at night because of fear of death. What should I do?*

Sadhguru: The survival instinct is very deep in every human being. It is not that the fear of death has come only because someone is HIV positive. Everybody has it but they may not be aware of it. You are reminded of this fear of death because of HIV. All others have forgotten and are living as if they are going to live for ten thousand years. Death awaits everybody. Everybody dies.

Right now, your mind is full of fear and anxiety: If you want to sleep, your mind brings you fear. It does not act in the way you want. Let me ask you a basic question: If your mind behaves according to your wish, will you keep it in a joyful state, or in a state of suffering? If you make your mind listen to you and behave as you want it to behave, no matter what happens to you, no matter what the external situation may be,

no matter what the physical condition may be, you shall of course keep your mind happy. You have to acquire this skill.

In this world, does anyone listen to you one hundred per cent? They do not. Nobody in this world is going to listen to you fully -- not your husband, your wife or your child. Even your dog will not listen to you. It will keep doing whatever nonsense it wants to do. Shouldn't at least your mind listen to you? If your own mind does not listen to you, who else will listen to you?

Let us say you are driving some vehicle -- be it a bicycle, a car or a scooter -- if it goes wherever you want it to go, then it is useful to you. But if you want your vehicle to go in a particular direction and it goes in another direction, then it is dangerous to you. Whenever the vehicle that you drive goes out of control, there will only be fear.

The same is true with your mind. If you have not acquired the skill of directing it, then we need to pay a little attention to it. We call this skill meditation. Meditation means our mind should behave according to our wishes. When your mind listens to you, then you will not create needless suffering, anxiety and fear.

All the suffering you have within you was created by you. The suffering that is outside is enough. The suffering that is in

your body is enough. Where is the need to create suffering in your mind too?

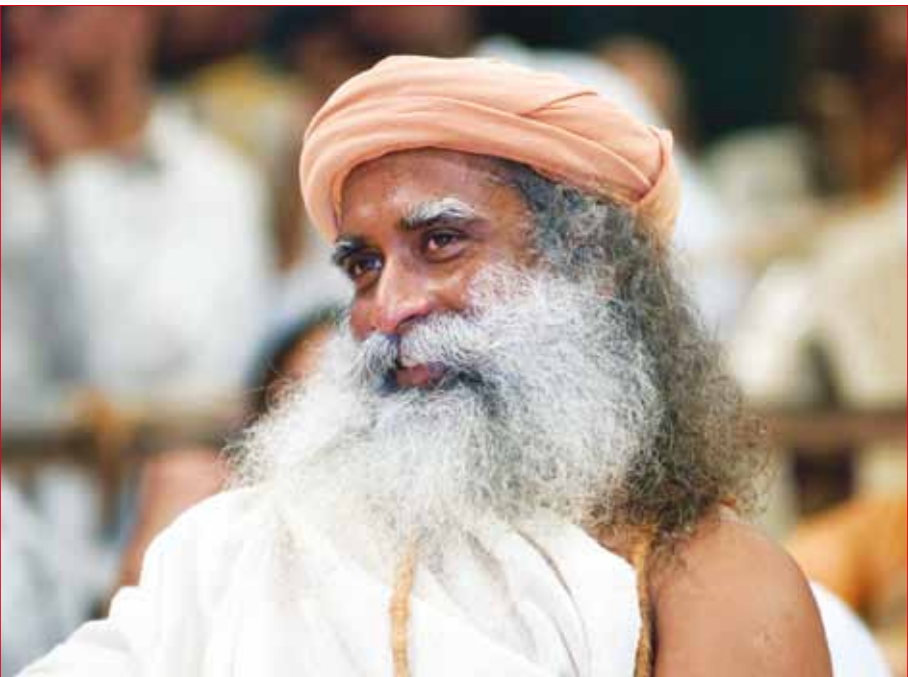


Questioner: My name is Sivagami. After 5 years of our happy marriage I came to know that my husband and I were infected with HIV. He died within 4-5 months of the diagnosis. Now for the last 9 years I have been living with HIV. I have a daughter who is 14 years old.

In the current social context, I have to swim against the current in order to continue living. Even for grown people like us, it is most perplexing to think of how we are going to live. How are we going to help our children grow and become independent in life? Things being this way, the future of the children of those who are affected like us is a big question mark.

What would you like to say about this?

Sadhguru: Children who are still at a young age, when they are over 6 or 7 years of age, if we teach them some simple systems of yoga, if we instill in them certain powerful yogic systems, they will respond much better than fully grown adults.



“No matter what situation we face, we can come out of it stronger or broken. This opportunity all of us have in our lives.”

I can say this with one hundred percent confidence. It can definitely change them.

Today there are cases of HIV positive individuals who have lived up to 15-20 years. If we stretch it up to 60 years, then it becomes a normal life span. I do not think that realizing

this is very far away. A combination of medication and yogic systems can enable a child to live a full life-span.

We have devised such practices, which could not only facilitate the optimal development of the body and mind, but also strengthen one's immune system. We would be very happy to offer it to them.



Questioner: *My name is Maheshwari and I come from Theni district. I am proud to say that I have won the elections for the first time and have become a councilor. I help people who are affected by HIV in my town to obtain all possible help from other agencies.*

The general belief is that people will die as soon as they get HIV. But, not only have I survived but have also done well in life and have become a councilor.

However, the society still discriminates against us. What do you have to say about this?

Sadhguru: If you want a solution to this problem, you need people like Maheshwari. In life, this kind of courage and strength is essential. Without this nothing is possible. Everyone

has some handicap or the other: Somebody's body is affected, somebody else's mind is affected, yet another person lacks something else in his life. But one should go beyond all this and create for himself the strength and self-confidence which will enable him to live by using all the capabilities he has.

When you live in a society, you must give up the wish that others should not say anything about you or criticize you. No matter what you do, somebody will say something about it. Even before you were affected by HIV, weren't people criticizing you or commenting about you?

If your goal and actions are right, and you keep going the same way, then the same people who are talking about you, the same people who are criticizing you, will venerate you in ten years' time. That is how life is.

Society has never spared anybody. It has happened to everyone. People have said a lot of things about me. There isn't anything that they have not said about me. It is not that you are the only one who is the target of unkind talk and unkind looks. Only if you are strong and self-confident, you can let others say what they want.

As long as our only goal is that the lives of those around us should be shaped well, then we can remain unaffected by what anyone says or does. We should be in such a state that

it should be possible for us to fully activate the life energy within us.



Questioner: My name is Vijayakumar and I come from Kancheepuram district. I have had HIV since 1995. In India, only less than 1% of the population is affected by HIV. The care offered to the rest of the 99%, of the population is being refused to 1% of us.

So, instead of focusing on the majority, if they take care of the infected population, the rest will be protected. But the government and the NGOs are not doing this. What is your view on this?

Sadhguru: The basic truth is that the economy of our country is such that not only those who have HIV, but also among the healthy, more than half the population of this country do not have enough food to eat. In such a situation, if a man gets a disease on top of it, he will suffer even more, because he will lose whatever skills he has, and with the hostility of the society, a situation will be created in his life where it is not possible for him to do anything.

That is why so many agencies have come forward to help them. This has begun only in the last few years; therefore,

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“A person who has the disease must of course be treated for it. There is no doubt whatsoever about this. But it is also equally important to see to that this disease is not spread to others.”

their work has not yet achieved full momentum. If this has to succeed, all of you should stand firm as one group, as one federation, and create a proper situation responsibly. Only then can you have the desired result.

Even though a lot of people are aware that there are many who are suffering so much and they want to help, they have no understanding of how to go about it. For this purpose, they have been holding conferences to discuss what to do and finally now they have begun to take some action.

I am not trying to belittle suffering. Nevertheless, compared to other diseases, HIV has been given a little more importance. Certainly much more attention needs to be given to HIV. This is very necessary because it is important to see that this disease does not spread to others.

A person who has the disease must of course be treated for it. There is no doubt whatsoever about this. But it is also equally important to see to that this disease is not spread to others. If what is today 13,000 people tomorrow can become 13 crores, the problem will become very big. If that happens, can we then do anything at all?

We can find a proper solution and provide proper care only if the number of people who are affected is small. But if the number goes beyond a certain limit, then it may not be possible to do anything to help the affected. Only because we are aware that we can solve the problem so long as it remains small, we are making all these efforts to see that the disease does not spread in future.

Therefore, to see that healthy people do not get this disease is also a very important step. Only if we keep a problem within limits, can we turn our full attention to it and correct it. If the problem becomes too big, we may end up in a situation where no one is capable of doing anything about it.



Questioner: *My name is Sophia and I am 12 years old. I live in an orphanage in Pollachi. My father was a lorry driver and my mother a tailor. My father had HIV and my mother got it from him and I got it from my mother. After my father died both my mother and I came to live in the orphanage. My mother is no more.*

There are children who have HIV and also those who do not have HIV living in the orphanage. Why should children like me suffer for my parent's mistake?

Sadhguru: First of all, let there be no thoughts in a child's mind whether her parents did the right thing or the wrong thing. We can get a disease in several ways. Now that you have got it, you have to see how you should live, so that you can go beyond it.

When suffering comes to people, some of them attain maturity because of it. They cultivate within themselves love, compassion and such like qualities. They will grow into better human beings. But some other people become filled by hatred, anger and a needless feeling of guilt. They make themselves miserable, and become bitter and negative.

Now you are very young, you have a full life ahead of you. There is a lot of research being done on HIV. So, a solution to

the problem will certainly be found. But, the most important thing is that you do not think that you got this disease because of other people's wrongdoing. If you think like that, then you will end up with unnecessary anger and hatred. You will only become a bitter person. There is already enough suffering in your body; you should not create a situation where your mind is also poisoned. You have the ability to change into a good person, a loving person, a person who understands life well.

If you look at manure, it is made up of all kinds of filth. If we put this manure on our head, our lives will become filthy. Instead, if you take this manure and put it at the root of a plant, then you get a beautiful flower. So, we can use the same manure to either make ourselves dirty or to yield a beautiful flower. We can also make it yield a mango fruit. We do not even touch the manure because it is so dirty, but by using the same manure we get a tasty mango which we enjoy.

Similarly, now in our life, some filth has come, and we can use it to bloom as a flower. No one can do anything about what has already happened. We have to see how to use this disease as manure to bloom into a flower.



Questioner: *My name is Saraswathi. It has been four years since I have been infected by*

HIV. They say that if I practice meditation, this virus will diminish and I shall become alright.

Will my disease be cured if I practice meditation?

Sadhguru: Like I said before we cannot call HIV/AIDS a specific disease. It is the process of our immune system getting more and more ineffective and finally, totally breaking down.

Now, if I make a blanket statement about the extent to which your body's resistance can be increased, it will not be true with everybody. This is because the extent to which your body's resistance can be increased will be different for different people. But we can certainly increase the body's power of resistance to this disease by certain practices like meditation and yoga.

Above all, we can correct your mental state. If your mind listens to you, you will have no suffering inside. The suffering will be only in your body. We can do something about the suffering in your body with medicine or by other means. But the biggest suffering is the suffering in the mind. We can certainly root out this suffering with yogic practices.



Questioner: *Pranams to Sadhguru. I am Dr. Mahadevan and I work at Coimbatore Medical College. I have treated more than 5,000 HIV patients so far. My problem is, whenever my patient dies it takes 2-3 days for me to recover from that shock. I am burdened by these deaths.*

How to come out of it this burden?

My second question is: Can we do anything for them to have a spiritually glorified death?

Sadhguru: Just now somebody was talking about hospitals and doctors refusing to treat HIV patients even at the time of delivery and situations like that. So, we certainly need Mahadevas like you.

It is extremely important that doctors, social workers or an HIV patient who has taken the responsibility of leading the associations or people who are doing good work in the society are taken care of well. This is something that as a nation we have neglected.

A few years ago someone came up to me and asked: "You have taken up all this work. You are making young people stand up and do the same. What is the use? Do you know what happened to Mahatma Gandhi? Even his own children could not go to school."

If Mahatma Gandhi's children did not go to school, it is not a shame for Mahatma Gandhi. It is a shame for all of us as a nation that we did not take care of the children of a man who gave his life for the nation. We did not even take care of his children, by sending them to school and nourishing them as necessary.

It is extremely important that you remain in good condition so that you could work much more efficiently. However deep your involvement may be, still you have to go to the next person lying there. So it is extremely important that you remain in good condition. For this I would like to invite you to take a program at the Yoga Center which will definitely empower you to go through these situations without being either burdened or callous. Please come and go through the program.

To be involved and not entangled is something that is essential for people to be effective in life. Because people are afraid of entanglement, they talk about detachment. If you are detached you will not know life. Only in involvement you know life. People are afraid of involvement because they do not know how to be involved but not entangled. So bringing a huge sense of involvement within everybody without entanglement is something that needs to happen. This involvement without entanglement needs to happen not just to a doctor, a social worker or to an infected person. It has to happen to everybody in the world. That is the basic essence of my work.

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When there is no fear of entanglement you will throw yourself into anything without hesitation. This hesitation is the cruelest thing on the planet. We definitely don't want you to suffer from that.

Now, about bringing a spiritual dimension to somebody who is in the process of dying, as a doctor you have seen people dying various ways, of various diseases, old age or whatever. Almost 90% of the people in this world die with some disturbance, suffering and struggle. Very few people die peacefully and even fewer people die joyfully and extremely few people die blissfully.

Even if we cannot create blissfulness, creating peacefulness is definitely possible. But it may not be possible to create that at the last moment. When the person is a little more conscious and capable, we can bring a simple yogic process into his life, we could teach him something and that would be best.



Questioner: *My name is Muthu. I have come from Tuticorin. I have been living with HIV for the last 14 years. Many people affected by HIV have become addicted to drugs and alcohol.*

How to get them out of this?

Sadhguru: This is not just with the people affected by HIV. Addiction has grown into a big culture. Earlier this problem was limited to a small percentage of the population, but now it is growing into a big culture. In the near future, there may even be a situation of hostility to those who do not take drugs or alcohol. In many places this has already happened. If you do not take drugs, you are considered useless in certain places. This is what society has come to.

So, it is not that people get addicted to drugs because of HIV; it is that people with HIV could be facing a much bigger problem. Because they are afraid of this disease, taking drugs and alcohol may give them the pleasant feeling of temporarily escaping from their fear. If they drink and lie down, they do not have to think about HIV or for that matter anything else.

Why has the need for intoxicants arisen? It is because, within ourselves, we are unable to be comfortable where we are sitting. If you are able to experience happiness just by sitting in a place, will you feel the need to take drugs? But we are unable to be like that. If we just sit down, some problem or the other agitates us. If we get a little intoxicated, it feels peaceful.

Now, shall we make you like that without using intoxicants? Many people have become like that just by doing yoga. If they just sit and close their eyes they start dancing. Now without

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spending any money, without any harm to the health, we experience such intoxication inside us, which is one hundred times more powerful than any drug. At the same time, we can also be fully aware.

We call this kind of drug yoga. A Yogi is the biggest drunkard but he does not drink the outside stuff. They drink from within. Do I look like I am drunk? I am fully intoxicated, yet I am fully aware!



ISHA FOUNDATION

Isha Foundation is a non-religious, not-for-profit, public service organization which addresses all aspects of human wellbeing. From its powerful yoga programs for inner transformation to its inspiring social and environmental projects, Isha activities are designed to create an inclusive culture that is the basis for global harmony and progress. This approach has gained worldwide recognition and reflects in Isha Foundation's Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

At the core of the Foundation's activities is Isha Yoga, a powerful system of yoga which distills ancient yogic methods for a modern person, creating peak physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. This basis of total wellbeing accelerates inner growth, allowing each individual to realize their ultimate nature.

Isha Foundation also implements several large-scale human service projects to support individual growth, revitalize the human spirit, rebuild communities, and restore the environment. These include ***Action for Rural Rejuvenation***, a rural development

program offering medical care, community rehabilitation, and human upliftment to more than 2,500 destitute villages in southern India. Out of deep concern for the global effects of deforestation and environmental degradation, Isha Foundation has launched **Project GreenHands**, the grassroots ecological initiative which aims at mass tree planting and creating environmental awareness. Since its inception in 2004, the project has successfully overseen the planting of more than five million trees by over one million people. **Isha Vidhya**, an Isha Education Initiative, is committed to raise the level of education and literacy in rural India and help disadvantaged children realize their full potential. The initiatives' goal is to offer pioneering English medium, computer-based education in at least 206 new schools in rural Tamil Nadu by 2014.

Supported by hundreds and thousands of active and dedicated volunteers in over 150 centers worldwide, the Foundation's activities serve as a thriving model for human empowerment and community revitalization throughout the world.

Isha Yoga Center

Isha Yoga Center, founded under the aegis of Isha Foundation, is located on 150 acres of lush land at the foothills of the Velliangiri Mountains that are part of a reserve forest with abundant wildlife. Created as a powerful *sthana*

(a center for inner growth), this popular destination attracts people from all parts of the world. It is unique in its offering of all aspects of yoga – gnana (knowledge), karma (action), kriya (energy), and *bhakthi* (devotion) and revives the *Guru-shishya parampara* (the traditional method of knowledge transfer from Master to disciple).

The center houses the architecturally distinctive Spanda Hall and Garden, a 64,000 sq ft meditation hall and program facility that is the venue of many advanced residential programs. Also located at the Center are the Dhyanalinga Yogic Temple, Theerthakund, Isha Rejuvenation Center, Isha Home School and Vanaprastha for families. Isha Yoga Center provides a supportive environment for people to shift to healthier lifestyles, improve their relationships, seek a higher level of self-fulfillment, and reach their full potential.

How To Get To Isha Yoga Center

Isha Yoga Center is located 30 km west of Coimbatore, at the foothills of Velliangiri Mountains, part of the Nilgiris Biosphere. Coimbatore, a major industrial city in South India, is well connected by air, rail and road. All major national airlines operate regular flights into Coimbatore from Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Train services are available from all

the major cities in India. Regular bus and taxi services are also available from Coimbatore to Isha Yoga Center.

Visitors should contact Isha Yoga Center for availability and reservation of accommodation well in advance of arrival to the center, as they are generally fully booked.

Contact Us

Isha Yoga Center

Semmedu (P.O.), Velliangiri Foothills

Coimbatore - 641 114, India

Phone: +91-422-2515345

Email: info@ishafoundation.org

Isha Community Care Center,

109/A-1, Subbaiya Nagar,

Chettipalayam Road, Palladam,

Tiruppur District. Tamil Nadu

Email : ishacarecentre@gmail.com

Website: www.ishaoutreach.org

Tel: 94432 95242, 94425 90014

www.ishafoundation.org

